

# Success Gives Camden Dentist Reason to Smile; SBA Programs Help in Growing Practice

Success is giving Dr. Alesia J. Johnson a reason to smile these days. Since opening Waterfront Dental Center in January of 2003, Dr. Johnson has quickly built a successful dental practice in the middle of downtown Camden.

Dr. Johnson, a graduate of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) has been practicing dentistry since 1998. After practicing for five years in other dental practices, Dr. Johnson decided it was time to go out on her own.

But before she could go out on her own, Dr. Johnson realized she needed some assistance. That's when she turned to two Camden-based business organizations that helped her realize her dream of starting her own dental practice.

Dr. Johnson worked with the Rutgers Camden Small Business Development Center and the Cooperative Business Assistance Corporation; both non-profit organizations receive funding from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) in order to help South Jersey entrepreneurs, like Dr. Johnson, succeed.

Through the Rutgers Camden Small Business Development Center, Dr. Johnson worked with consultant Steve Applebaum, where she received help in developing her business plan. The plan was instrumental in helping her secure the necessary financing to open her practice.

With her business plan in hand, Dr. Johnson worked with the Cooperative Business Assistance Corporation (CBAC) to obtain financing for her new dental practice. Harry Stone and Victoria Rose of CBAC were able to put together a creative finance package that totaled \$335,000. The package included financing from SBA's MicroLoan program, which is administered by CBAC. The loan was a \$22,000 working capital SBA MicroLoan that provided Waterfront Dental Center with the necessary cash flow the practice needed until Dr. Johnson could build up her client base.

CBAC participating lenders loaned Dr. Johnson \$80,000; CBAC loaned another \$80,000; and the New Jersey Economic Development Authority loaned \$80,000. The remainder of the funding came from a dental supply company and Dr. Johnson.

The creative financing package allowed Dr. Johnson to purchase her own building, dental equipment and purchase another practice.

"It was a challenge coming into Camden," said Dr.



**Success and a Smile**—A \$22,000 SBA Microloan from the Cooperative Business Assistance Corporation gave Dr. Alesia J. Johnson (left) the necessary cash flow to launch her dental practice in Camden.

Johnson. "The support I received from the Rutgers Camden Small Business Development Center and the Cooperative Business Assistance Corporation allowed me to start and grow my practice in the city."

"It is great to see SBA programs at work," said SBA New Jersey District Director James A. Kocsi. "We are fortunate to have partnerships with the Rutgers Camden Small Business Development Center and Cooperative Business Assistance Corporation. This alliance allows us to assist small business owners throughout Southern New Jersey. When you see a young African-American dentist take an abandoned building in the middle of Camden and turn it into a thriving dental practice, then you can truly appreciate how business programs supported by the SBA can transform communities."

It is that type of success that prompted the New Jersey Small Business Development Centers (NJSBDC) to honor Dr. Johnson with an NJSBDC 2004 Success Award.

Even though she purchased another practice, Dr. Johnson started with a base of only 200 patients. Today, Waterfront Dental Center has 2,000 patients. Dr. Johnson employs three full-time staff members and Dr. Vaughn Clemens, an Endodontist (Root Canal Specialist) who comes in three times a month.

Waterfront Dental Center provides its patients with exams, cleanings, dentures, partials, crowns, and root canals. "We have state-of-the-art digital X-ray equipment that allows us to view the X-ray on a computer screen immediately," said Dr. Johnson. "This new X-ray equipment eliminates the traditional lab where you develop X-rays."

"I basically built this practice from scratch," said Dr. Johnson. "I see the change in the area. I used to be the only business on this side of Cooper Street. Now we have other businesses, new apartments, and new development taking place; the neighborhood is undergoing a nice transformation."

Patients come from the Camden area. "I have a lot of patients that work at Camden City Hall, some faculty and students from Rutgers University, Leap Academy, and WHYY – the Public Television Station," said Dr. Johnson. "As soon as we opened our doors, there was a surge of patients. When I was doing research for my business plan I learned that for every 11,000 people in Camden there is one dentist."

Currently, Dr. Johnson has two rooms fully-equipped to work on her patients. "We are open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., as well as one Saturday a month," said Dr. Johnson. "We do not overbook appointments. This is a private practice that provides our patients with a quiet and comfortable setting." Dr. Johnson said there is also room to add another station down the road. She is also looking to renovate the upstairs space for an Orthodontist.

"Right now that is phase II of my plan," said Dr. Johnson. "I may also add a general dentist in the near future."

But for now Dr. Johnson is too busy taking care of all her patients. That alone gives her all the more reason to smile.